Touch Faith

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by norgbelulah

Summary

For complicated and unofficial reasons, Raylan and Tim go back to the gay bar in Miami.

But is it really undercover if you're screwing your partner?

Notes

I always wanted to return to this AU universe. Thanks to Thornfield Girl for encouraging me to do it, and finished the damn thing!

Tim wakes before Raylan does. Always.

They rarely spend the whole night together, but the stakeout and subsequent arrest had been a long one and he'd made Tim come home with him for a quickie, a bourbon, and bed.

Now Tim is groaning, rolling over, sitting up. Raylan keeps his eyes closed.

When they do sleep over, Tim always wakes first.

"Can I use your toothpaste?" He asks that every time, too.

"Fucking God, Tim," Raylan groans and says nothing else.

Tim leaves the bed and it feels colder without him. Even with the sun shining in through his balcony.

He never asks about the shampoo, though. Or the conditioner, or the goddamn toothbrush, which Raylan knows he uses. Just the toothpaste, like it's some precious commodity.

He dozes off after that and stops thinking about it.

A wet finger slides behind his ear and he startles awake. "Shit," he curses. "What the--"

"You're gonna be late," Tim tells him. "You're welcome."

Raylan jerks away from his hand. "Dan don't give a hoot we come in late." He catches Tim smiling at him. "What?"

"Watch that accent," he says. "I should stay over more often. You're cute in the morning."

Raylan just frowns at him, brain too sluggish to really process anything at full capacity, and Tim takes an unconscious step back, like he's thinking maybe he shouldn't have said that. Raylan doesn't know what to think, so he says nothing and pulls himself from the bed.

Tim speeds into the kitchen. "Coffee's almost ready," he says.

"Fuck you," Raylan growls.

When they get to work, Raylan a conspicuous fifteen minutes behind Tim, it's nothing but paperwork from the night before and Karen Sisco commenting on Tim's clothes from the day before.

"You had time to pick up a girl after you brought in Van Alden?" she asks, glancing between the two of their desks.

Tim just shrugs, cool as ever. "Why not?" He tilts his head at her. "You don't think I've got game?"

She smirks. “Not that kind of game. I’m betting you just fell asleep on Raylan’s couch.”

Neither one of them admits to it. She’ll think they’re trying to cover something up. Which they are.

Raylan doesn’t think that anyone would be pissed that either of them are sleeping with a dude. Dan would just be pissed because they’re they’re both sleeping with their partner and that’s really not allowed. But Raylan doesn’t want to fuck their situation up. They pull in more guys than anybody else does.

He also has a hunch that Tim’s just used to the closet via Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. Poor boy’s still not telling anyone. Raylan just doesn’t have anybody in his life who would give a shit.

The day is boring and long, except when Raylan spends twenty-five minutes sending a string of inappropriate texts to Tim, who is studiously avoiding looking at him.

“Did u put some of my cum in your hair 2day? It looks really good,” “I’m kidding. ever seen something about mary?” and “nvrmind. its too floppy. more like conan,” all get no response.

But he does get a sidelong glare at, “next time less teeth on my dick pls.” So he quits. He receives a phone call anyway.

Fifteen minutes after that. Tim is not at his desk and Raylan gets a text that says, “my hair is perfect. you are a dick. and you love the way i suck it.”

It’s true. Tim is really good. And his hair isn’t even that high. Raylan knows he takes a lot of care with it.

He winks when Tim returns from the bathroom and sits back down at his desk. Tim keeps his face poker-straight.

Raylan grins like a maniac.

Tim drinks too much.

Raylan probably does too, objectively. But Tim slides from drinking too much to being much too drunk more easily than Raylan does.

They rarely drink together, socially, anyway. They don’t go to bars together, they meet up after, and Raylan can tell by how dirty Tim’s texts are whether or not he needs to take a cab.

Tonight they are filthy. Tonight Raylan doesn’t engage with, “Wanna lick my come off yr stupid face,” or with, “rim jobs ltr or nuthin, dickhead.” He just replies, “Take a cab or I’m calling Dan,” and waits for Tim to arrive.

Tim drinks more when he’s bored, when a case breaks and they don’t have anything to occupy them but shuffling papers and shooting the shit. Tim prefers shooting actual shit,

though he’s got a well-developed, dry sense of humor that Raylan sincerely enjoys, but also gets the feeling that a lot of it is forced when things are quiet, like he’s trying to maintain.

When Tim gets to Raylan’s place, he knocks loud and when Raylan opens the door, he pushes in, half-stumbling, and holds out his hand. “You gonna give me fifteen bucks?”

Raylan crosses his arms. “Am I paying for sex now?”

Tim just stumbles to the couch. He sits with his head in his hands.

“Were you by yourself?” Tim did that sometimes.

He shakes his head. “Rangers, in town for some fuckin’ shit. I dunno.”

Raylan is glad. He would have felt compelled to say something if Tim had gotten this smashed just drinking by himself.

He goes into the kitchen for a glass of water and some chips. "I suppose you ain't feeling up to rimming," he says.

Tim raises his head, frowning. "What?"

It isn’t actually anything they had ever done before. This thing between them hadn’t been going on so long they would have gotten that adventurous, especially when they do most of their screwing in some sort of state of inebriation or sleeplessness.

Raylan grins at him. “Check your phone, dickhead.”

Tim looks down at it, flipping through pages and punching too hard at the screen. “Oh, shit.”

Raylan crosses the room. He sits next to Tim casually, but leans in close. Tim looks terrified. “You want me to lick your asshole?” Raylan asks him softly.

The answer is automatic, blurted, like it was surprised out of him, “No, I wanted to lick yours.”

Tim never talks about what he wants. He sends these filthy messages and sometimes they do the things and sometimes they get so wrapped up in other shit, or are too tired, or whatever, that they don’t. He never says anything about it. Never complains.

Raylan touches his face. “I’m gonna remember that,” he says and kisses him.

Drunk Tim kisses very differently than Sober Tim. Super Drunk Tim is kind of a mess--way too much tongue, way too fast, lots of teeth and spit--but it makes Raylan smile as he climbs up on him and gets his lips around his ear lobe.

“You’re so good to me,” he says, a little loudly into Raylan’s ear.

He jerks his head back, looks up, frowning. “No I ain’t.”

Tim just kisses him again, making little grunting noises and rutting his crotch up on Raylan's thigh.

"Pull it out then," Raylan tells him and sees, as Tim reaches down, that his hands are shaking.

Raylan knows Tim has Army friends in the area. He avoids them. These guys were from out of town. Harder to avoid.

Raylan helps him. Tim doesn't seem to realize Raylan noticed. Maybe he didn't even notice. He's smiling, kissing his neck. "Get me off," he says.

"You think you can make it?" Raylan asks, not entirely doubtfully.

"Let's find out."

He can and does and later Raylan comes too, though they never make it off the couch. It's late and they're careless, and Raylan knows it's way past the time they both should have been at work as he wakes to a knock on his door.

"Fuck," he says loudly. He left his phone in the bedroom.

Tim slides off him, from where he'd been sleeping in the crook of his shoulder, and half onto the floor, reaching blindly for his phone. "It's on silent for some reason," he mumbles.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," Raylan groans. He gets up, glaring at Tim to get himself together, motioning with his hand to the bedroom.

Raylan walks across the room and opens the door to see Dan Grant, his boss, only belatedly realizing, he's wearing no shirt.

Dan looks him up and down, and says, "I know you think I don't care when you're late, but--"

He breaks off then, his attention shifting behind Raylan as Tim stumbles, tripped up by his pants, across the living room. Dan's eyes widen, his lips thin, and his face turns white.

He pushes past Raylan, who knows the damage has been done and lets him pass.

"Is that--was that *Gutterson?" Dan's voice has gone cold and quiet.*

Oh, shit, is really all Raylan is thinking, so he takes too long to answer.

Dan glares at him. "It fucking was. And you're looking too guilty for him to have just crashed on your couch. Which is what you should have said is going on here. Jesus, Raylan."

Raylan opens his mouth, but Dan raises a hand. "Don't. We're passed that now." He turns towards Raylan's bedroom and calls, "Get your ass out here this minute, Timmy."

When Tim comes out, he is shamefaced and also wearing more clothes than Raylan currently is, which he does not appreciate at all. He feels bad for scowling, but he's also not really feeling up to being reassuring.

Tim is nowhere near on the same standing with Dan as Raylan is--they sort of came up around the same time--so he can understand why Tim looks like he just shat himself and wants to grovel at Dan's feet anyway.

Dan draws his pointed finger between the two of them. He takes a long time to speak, and Raylan can practically feel the fear rolling off Tim until he says, "I'm not sure I look as pissed as I am right now. I want you to know, I am really fucking pissed."

"I'm--" Tim starts, but abruptly closes his mouth when both Dan and Raylan throw him a hard glare.

Dan growls, "You are not to speak, Gutterson. Anything you say will only make me more pissed off." He turns to Raylan. "How long has this been going on?"

Dealing with Dan pissed is like backing away from a wild animal, one bigger and more ferocious than you. Tim wouldn't know how to do it. Dan almost never gets as pissed as he is right now. Raylan keeps his voice even and his sentences short. "Since the Santino thing."

"That long?"

"Yes."

Dan glares at them both. "You are deceitful little shits, aren't you?"

Raylan makes sure Tim knows not to answer this question.

There are some things he could say, like, "We knew you'd be mad," or "It's none of your damn business." But he doesn't say them, because they're cheap and stupid, and it doesn't really matter now.

Dan blinks at him after a stretch of silence and says, "Put a goddamn shirt on, asshole."

Raylan doesn't move just yet. He glances at Tim.

Dan groans. "Nevermind. I'll say one more thing and then he and I are out," he gestures at Tim. Raylan squints at him and Dan shakes his head, "Yeah, like I'm going to leave him alone with you after this."

"What's the thing?" Raylan asks, quite reasonably.

"You cut this shit out, or I separate you in the field. I will not tolerate fraternization between partners. I told you that, Raylan, years ago."

"I know," Raylan says clearly.

“Then you’re twice the asshole I thought you were. Did he know?” Dan doesn’t even look at Tim as he asks the question, hands on his hips.

“I really have no idea,” Raylan answers. “You think we did that much talkin’?”

Dan throws his hands in the air. “Fuck you, Raylan.” He turns to the door, but glares back at Tim. “You,” he says, “get your shit. We’re leaving.” Another finger gets right in Raylan’s face, “You’re fifteen minutes behind us, or you’ve lost your job. I’m not fucking around, Givens.”

They leave with a slam of the door and a weirdly puppy-dog look from Tim. Raylan sort of collapses on his couch with a sigh, not of relief, really. But something like it.

Everyone in the office knows Dan is pissed, but it seems like they’re not quite sure why. Karen drops him a look as he comes in and mutters, “What did you do?”

“The usual,” he replies and walks away, deciding to let her chew on that for a while.

Tim looks like he’s been chewed up and spit out several times over. Raylan wishes they weren’t in the office, just for like five minutes, to reassure him that, no he isn’t going to lose his job, and that Dan Grant’s ire lasts about as long as it takes for the next big case to get on top of the pile. In Miami, that’s never too long.

Tim looks up from pretending to be extremely busy as Raylan comes over, and suddenly Raylan remembers what Dan said--cut it out or split up. Raylan thinks he wouldn’t feel right doing either, but really doesn’t want to examine why too closely.

He decides maybe he doesn’t want to talk to Tim.

“Givens, Gutterson,” Dan yells from his office.

“Shit,” he says. Tim scowls at him.

When they come in to Dan’s office, he throws a file at Tim. “Parolee keeps coming around to this place, messing with the bartender. She’s about to get a restraining order. The parole officer’s a friend of mine, calling in a favor. Go knock some sense into the guy.”

Tim opens the file and his face goes white. Raylan grabs it from him. He glances down and sees a picture of a pretty girl, blonde, nice tits that he can see anyway. Then he sees the address written down as her place of work. His eyebrows rise. “This is Santino’s boyfriend’s bar.”

Dan is smirking at him, evilly. “Yeah. And?”

“This is a gay bar.” Raylan states, dumbly.

“You got a problem?”

He frowns. "What's this girl doing working at a goddamn gay bar?"

"They're an equal opportunity employer, Raylan," Dan cries. "How the fuck should I know? You gonna take the case or are you gonna give me your badges?"

Tim looks downright terrified.

Raylan scoffs. "Cut that shit out, Dan. This is beyond the purview and you know it." He turns to Tim, lays a hand on the boy's too stiff shoulder. "He won't fire us for this case. It's not Marshal business."

"It is if I say it is, goddammit, Raylan."

"He can fire us for the other thing. But I don't think he's going to." Raylan glares at Dan, daring him to say any different. "He likes us."

"Get out," Dan grumbles, flopping into his desk chair. "You take this shit-cake walk to decide how you want to play it. Let me know in 24 hours, or I decide."

They don't tell anyone where they're going. Last time, undercover at a Miami Strip gay bar was the joke of the office, something everyone hand in or an opinion on. This time, they just scowl at each other until Tim grumbles, "I need to go home and get changed. I'll meet you there at 10."

Raylan doesn't know what face he's making. "Make it 9:30. The guy always shows up around 10. I want to be ready."

Tim eyes him. "You gotta get into character?"

Raylan knows he's frowning now. He sort of wants to ask Tim just what the fuck that's supposed to mean, but he bites his tongue and says, "We should probably have some kind of cover, right?"

Tim gives him a hard, considering look. "Do you want to be strangers or boyfriends?"

Raylan turns away. "I have to think about it, I guess. Let's figure it out when we get there."

"You know that's probably not going to work out with the other thing," Tim says after him.

Raylan keeps walking.

They meet outside the bar. It only opened like a half hour before and there's barely anybody around.

Tim has changed his shirt and put more shit than usual in his hair. He's probably showered too, but that's more reasonable. The shirt he's wearing isn't one Raylan has seen before. The

fabric is thin and stretchy, almost sheer and it's this deep, plum-like purple that looks really nice with the color of Tim's eyes. Raylan looks at him and feels sort of bad for just taking off his tie and unbuttoning his collar a bit.

Tim is clearly disturbed by the look on Raylan's face. "What? I just changed my shirt."

Raylan shakes his head. "Looks good." Tim looks away.

They decide that Raylan will go in and talk to the girl and that Tim will loiter outside the bar, wait for the guy, and follow him in. They will pretend not to know each other. They will resolve the situation as quietly as possible, and then leave. They don't talk about after.

The bar is expansive. Raylan should probably start thinking of it as a club, because there's more than one bar inside. It takes him a few minutes to figure out which bar the girl is tending. He finds her in a tucked away corner, near the VIP room, but not inside it.

Raylan sits. There are a bunch of empty seats, as the place is almost deserted--the real crowd not coming in until well after dinner and probably a stop at another place for less expensive drinks. He looks into the room beyond the one he's in, not the cordoned-off VIP room in front of him, but the one to his left, the Green Room, as it's apparently called, where Tim had got him out of a weird and bad situation, the night they started this whole thing.

He hadn't had an incident like that--the spiralling sensation, the remembered fear--since that night. He can't decide if he likes the idea that it was somehow Tim's doing. It seems too romantic for what they have going on, but to say it has nothing at all to do with him would be a damn lie. Not that Raylan is any stranger to lying to himself.

The girl--the file says her name is Amanda--comes up to him, and he turns his attention on to her. She's a petite blonde, with a nice smile and eyes that are a little too wary. You'd think she'd be able to calm down a bit in a place like this--he wonders if this guy is the reason she's got this job. He feels bad what must have been a desperate play didn't actually work out for her.

He orders a Jim Beam from her, knowing he's going to have to pay at least twice what it's worth. When she brings it over, he leans in over the bar and tells her what he's doing there.

Her eyes widen and the first thing she says is, "I didn't think you belonged in here."

He smirks. "You'd be surprised."

He tells her he's just waiting on the guy and that he's got a partner, coming in behind him. Things shouldn't get out of control, but if they do, she should call both her her manager and 9-1-1.

"What's out of control?" she asks dubiously.

"One of us, me or my partner, are unconscious." The Jimmy has too much ice. "It won't come to that. But I hear this guy's pretty big."

“Oh yeah,” she says, laughing it off with something dark lurking in her gaze. “Big enough his nickname on the inside was ‘Tiny.’”

“He got a short fuse?”

She shrugs. “He’s always nice to me. In the creepiest way possible. And he knows he can’t fight nobody for real, or they’ll throw him back in jail. But he’s still making my life hell.”

Raylan’s a little annoyed he doesn’t have a plan formed on how to approach this guy yet.

About twenty-five minutes later, the guy, Derrick, or Tiny, apparently, rolls up to the bar. He knows where her spot is. His pants are falling off and his t-shirt’s over-sized, baseball cap crooked and looking stupid as hell. It’s obvious he doesn’t belong in this place, even in the early hours of the evening. Most of the people wandering in, from room to room are out-rightly staring at him.

Half a beat behind him, Tim strolls in, looking like he’s on the prowl, eyeing Tiny up like a piece of meat.

Tiny sits down in the middle of the bar and Tim goes around to his left side, opposite from Raylan. He gives Raylan a look, smirks, and proceeds to loudly order two shots of Jack Daniels. Amanda is looking between all three of them like she’s not sure what she’s in for, but she gets the drinks and sort of backs away.

Tiny is trying to get her attention, smiling like he’s undressing her already and laying a hand all the way across the bar, until Tim sidles up next to him. “Hey, man,” he says, almost flirtatiously, “I got one for you.”

Raylan’s jaw drops, and he hopes he lifts it quickly enough no one’s noticed.

Tim’s smile at Tiny is warm and his eyes are sincerely interested. The guy replies, “Uh, thanks,” and they take the shot together, Tim with a little hiss and a whoop, as though he can’t quite handle it. Raylan has to cough instead of laugh.

He spends the next hour watching this amusing little dance, sucking on his whiskey-soaked ice, then ordering another--this time a double--Jim Beam, as Tim buys this guy drink after drink, talking with him about his life, and interrupting with a compliment, a pat on the shoulder, a touch on the hand, hesitant, but obvious, every time Tiny tries to engage with Amanda.

Tim says he likes Tiny’s look. He seems impressed by his time spent in prison. He calls him, “dangerous,” and says things like, “ohmigod, that’s so cooool.” He tells Tiny that he’s in the medical profession, “But, oh honey, no, not a doctor. That takes way too much school, right?” and that he loves to work out, “but I’m not any good at self-defence.”

He wants to know what Tiny did to get put away and how long he stayed in--though they know from his file it was trafficking and five years--and calls him, “mysterious stranger,” when he won’t fess up. He smiles like he’s having the time of his life, and leans in close and whispers something in Tiny’s ear. He’s looking across at Raylan the whole time.

Tiny shoves away from the bar at whatever it is Tim's making that face about, hissing, "No way, man, get the fuck away from me." He stumbles away quickly, and Tim looks like he's about to go after him, but Raylan is there, pushing him back down into his seat. "You're gonna start a fight, he sees you again right now. I've got this."

Tim nods, looking a little worse for wear. And Raylan smiles, feeling a rush of warmth for him. He looks real good in that purple shirt and his eyes are wide, his mouth hanging open a little, like he wants to say something. "Order a water," Raylan tells him. He looks up at Amanda, who's come over, obviously trying to listen in. "He's gonna order a water," he says, not entirely trusting Tim to listen to him.

Raylan turns and follows the route he took through this maze of a club, slipping through the increasingly large crowd and out into the open air of the street outside. Tiny's trying to break through the line into the front door, maybe to hail a cab, maybe to just wander off into the night. he's shaking his head and cursing up a storm. Raylan moves faster, with purpose, and intercepts him, dragging him roughly by the arm and into the alley next to the building.

Someone is giving a blowjob at the far end, but Raylan doesn't look twice. He pushes Tiny up against the wall, grins toothily and says, "I've got something to show you."

"Ahh, what now, man?" Tiny practically screams, eyes wild.

Raylan pushes his jacket aside to reveal his badge and has to hold the man up from sagging to the ground in relief. "You saw me at the bar before?"

"Yeah," Tiny answers. "You see that guy creepin' on me? What a fucking--"

Raylan grabs the asshole by the mouth hard, so his heads snaps to the side. He looks at Raylan out of the corner of his terrified eyes. "I want you to think real carefully about the shit that is coming out of your mouth right now, Derrick."

Tiny's eyes widen.

"Yeah," Raylan says. "You thought this was a coincidence? Just like you thought you could never be put in a position where someone could make you uncomfortable in a sexual fashion. Well, now you know different, don't you?"

Tiny nods, brows furrowed.

"I am here," Raylan continues slowly, "because my boss is shit-pissed at me and he owes Ricky a fucking favor. This is not my usual gig, so if I have to come here again because my boss thinks I didn't do the job that he asked, I'm gonna be real pissed off and so is my partner. You remember? That creepy fucker, made you squirm? So, you're gonna leave that girl alone now, ain't you? And you and I will never have to have any kind of conversation, verbal or physical, again, right?"

Tiny nods one more time and Raylan lets him go, backing up just one step, and watching him scamper out of that alley like he's running from a cave-in.

Raylan is glad he paid for the re-entry stamp on his hand, because he does not want to have to wait in the incredibly long line to go collect Tim, who will just continue drinking until Raylan shows back up again. Having counted all the shots the kid took with Tiny, Raylan is pretty sure he's just about at the stage where he's ready to forget that it's a really bad idea to drink more.

Sure enough, Tim is nursing something clear with a lime and ice in it when Raylan makes it back to the bar Amanda is tending. She smiles at him and asks, "You boys come up with that plan all by yourselves?"

Tim snorts. "No, it w's jus' me."

Raylan nods his agreement. It was sort of a stupid plan. But it worked surprisingly well.

"I didn't think Feds were allowed to drink on duty."

Tim laughs loudly at that, and Raylan finds himself sliding a hand over his shoulder and into the crook of his neck to get him to quit it. "It's frowned upon. This wasn't really an 'official' operation."

She grins at them. "Got it. And, thanks."

"Welcome," Tim slurs and tries to step gallantly away from the bar, running into Raylan in the process and nearly tripping over his shoes. Raylan catches him under the arms and feels a smile tug at his lips as Tim grins brilliantly up at him. He presses sort of close and says quietly, with that same flirtatious tone from before, "You wan' stay an' dance with me?"

Raylan's not a dancer, but Tim laughs at his grimace. "You suck," he says, drawing his hands down to grasp at Raylan's. His hands are warm and the music's loud and Raylan's feeling a pleasant buzz, probably from not bothering to eat any dinner.

Tim's eyes look bluer than usual, even though the place is dark.

Raylan thinks about Dan's ultimatum. He doesn't want to, he just wants Tim. "I've got an idea," he says, and lets his smile unfold.

He pulls Tim close behind him as he makes his way towards the VIP room, but veers off to the right and into the bathrooms at the side of the bar.

"Oh my god," Tim says, almost giggling. "Are you serious?"

The bathrooms are empty and nicely furnished, being so close to the high-rollers.

Raylan pulls Tim into one of the stalls, running his hands across the smooth, fabric stretching across Tim's biceps. "Do you like me because I'm dangerous?" he asks in a low voice, smirking.

Tim laughs softly and shakes his head, turning his lips to Raylan's ear. "No, I like you because you're an asshole and I'm a masochist." Raylan thinks that's maybe too strong a

word for it, but he lets Tim pull him closer, get his fingers at Raylan's belt. "I like you because I'm stupid and you're fun--and 'cause your cock tastes so fuckin' good, baby."

Raylan groans and leans back against the wall of the stall, and Tim is up on him, hand down his pants. Raylan's fly is already open, jeans falling half down. Tim kneels down on the pristine floor of the bathroom, laves him up twice and swallows him down easy. For how much alcohol he's consumed so far this evening, he's doing an expert job, practised and precise.

Raylan wishes for sheets to hold on to. He's more than satisfied by sinking his hands into Tim's gelled up hair. Tim makes a noise onto his dick and Raylan bucks up into him and he takes it so nice. "You ain't stupid," Raylan mumbles, eyes closed, head rocking back and forth. "Who tol' you that?" He keeps talking because Tim seems to be responding to his voice, edging out faster, sucking harder, moaning just a little as he does. "You came up wit' that plan, right? It was--" Raylan licks his lips, almost lost. "It's so good, Tim, ahh-" And he's coming into Tim's mouth.

Tim takes it all and smiles up at him like it was a gift. Raylan shifts his hand from Tim's hair, drawing his thumb to the corner of Tim's mouth, wiping a little of his come away. He raises it to his own mouth and watches Tim's eyes grow large. His pupils are already blown wide. He looks debauched and unsteady, wild.

"Have you ever fallen in love, Raylan?" he asks. He's still kneeling on the floor.

"I was married, kid. Remember?" Raylan feels bad the moment the words leave his mouth. He sounds dismissive. That's not what he meant.

Tim's smile turns uncertain and as Raylan pulls him to his feet he confesses, "I thought I loved a girl from high school. Or I was telling everybody that in basic. Made a show when Jody fucked her my third week in. But really, I was so relieved. Always thought her brother was cuter anyway."

Raylan gets himself together and smoothes Tim's hair down a bit. He smiles at Raylan, again like he's the gift that keeps on giving, and asks, "But you ever fall for a guy?" He frowns. "It's weird, right? It's so weird."

Raylan kisses him, hard, but lingering and soft at the end. Tim takes a deep breath into his mouth. When he pulls away, Raylan says, "Where are you getting this? It ain't weird, Timmy. It ain't any fucking different."

He looks hard into Tim's wide eyes, having a tough time reconciling the man who had pressed him up against a wall and kissed him, right out of the blue outside this very bar only months before, with this wide-eyed kid who apparently thinks so little of his own feelings.

"Are you okay?" Raylan asks him. "Besides being piss-drunk?"

Tim shakes his head, maybe no, but he replies, "I don't want to stop. I should. It shouldn't be a big deal, but--Raylan, I don't want to."

Raylan opens his mouth, then thinks better of it and closes it with a snap. He opens the door to the stall. He pushes Tim out and grabs him by the elbow, pulling him all the way through the bar. "Are you mad?" Tim keeps asking, because Raylan can't speak. "You're so mad. I'm so--"

Raylan whirls on him in the middle of the dance floor. "Don't do that," he says too harshly. He eyes Tim. "Since when do you care if I'm pissed at you?"

Tim's eyes are huge. "Do you want to stop?"

Raylan shakes his head, maybe no. "What I don't want is to talk about it here."

Tim looks angry now. His brows have drawn down deep, carving a line between his eyes, which look colder, but still so blue. "You never want to talk about fucking anything."

Raylan drops his hands from where he's been trying to pull Tim further along. "Since when do you?"

Tim looks like he wants to spit in his face. "You just don't pay attention, asshole." He pushes past Raylan forcefully and speeds towards the door. Raylan is forced to run after him. He almost bowls into the bouncer, who smiles at him in sympathy and says, "He giving you a hard time, honey?"

Raylan doesn't bother responding, he just keeps going and practically runs into Tim where he's halted right outside the door. Tim turns around and looks like he's about to shove Raylan away, but Raylan grabs hard at his arms and says clearly, "I will not have a fight with you here."

Tim sucks in a breath and demands, "Are you embarrassed by me?"

Raylan has had it. He stops himself from pushing back at Tim, but he does get into his face and say very deliberately, "Do not project your shit on me, Timothy. I don't care how drunk you are, or if you are scared shitless to lose whatever it is you think there is between us. I will not be some kind of emotional sponge for you. I will not soak up your shit and tell you it's fine. You're not fine about this, and I can't believe I let myself think that you were."

Tim's anger has disappeared. "Do you want to stop?" he asks again, like he's begging for an answer. He wants it to be over, ripping off the bandage, so to speak.

Raylan doesn't think it's that simple, doesn't want it to be just yes or no and then they're back to the way things were before. That's not going to work now, but he doesn't fucking want to talk about it here.

"You shut your mouth right now, and don't say another word until we get to my place, or I ain't talkin about it at all," Raylan grinds out.

Tim shakes his head. "Don't--don't talk to me like that," he says, as if pained.

Raylan feels bad, but not enough to say he's sorry. Tim is being goddamn ridiculous. "Just come home with me and we'll fucking talk about it, Tim. Come on now," he replies. The kid is

such a stubborn drunk, it's unbelieveable.

Raylan bundles Tim into his car, though they drove separately, and about halfway through the drive, Tim leans forward and puts his head in his hands.

"You gonna be sick?" Raylan asks, not entirely unsurprised. Tim had taken at least seven shots in a row, very quickly.

Tim groans, but says clearly, "No. It just... man, it hit me really hard." He looks up and Raylan glances away from the road to meet his eyes. "Raylan, I'm so sorry."

Raylan gives him an appraising look. "You been trying to keep a lid on that for a while, haven't you?"

Tim hides his face again and doesn't answer right away. "Maybe," he says finally. "I don't know. I wasn't thinking about it that way."

Raylan knows how that goes. He frowns. "Tell me what it was I was supposed to be paying attention to, Tim."

Tim's expression goes blank, like he has no idea what Raylan means, then he frowns deeply and shakes his head again. "That--that was nothing. It's stupid."

"You're damn right it's stupid, but that don't mean I don't want to know what you were talking about. There must have been some thought there."

Raylan is pulling up to his apartment complex now. It's a three storey building, older, with the pink pastel paint peeling off the stucco walls. He lives on the second floor and is hoping not to have to carry Tim most of the way up there.

Tim doesn't reply as they get out of the car, so Raylan starts thinking about it outloud. "Because, I'd wonder, you know? It's not like there's a lot of time to drop hints that you might want to talk about something, between your showing up here drunk or texting that I should come over four out of seven evenings in a week. It's not like we say much outside of, 'how you wanna do it?' when we're fucking. It's not like we can talk at work, or I say much of anything in the morn--" he breaks off and turns to Tim, who's been walking beside him up the stairs, slowly, but on his own. "Do not tell me it's the toothpaste thing."

Tim meets his eyes and Raylan knows it is.

"The toothpaste thing? Really?" He cries. "That was your play?"

"It's stupid, I know," Tim shrugs, apparently beyond feeling embarrassed by Raylan's incredulity. "I guess I was hoping you'd tell me to keep some shit in your place, since my asking always bugged you so much."

Raylan shakes his head. "That's some 3rd grade pigtail-pulling bullshit, Tim."

"Yeah," he sighs, rubbing a hand across his brow as they reach the door. "I know."

“I thought we were fine.” Raylan wants to make sure Tim understands a couple things before they talk about what they’re going to do. “I thought you would tell me, if you didn’t think we were fine. I’ve been flying blind here, if you’ve wanted for a while to--”

“It wasn’t a question of wanting or not wanting anything,” Tim says impatiently. “I was literally trying to think about it as little as possible.”

Raylan unlocks his door and lets Tim go in in front of him. He sets his keys on the table just inside. “Well, you’ve got to quit that, right now. No matter what we decide.” He sighs and takes off his hat, which he miraculously held on to through that entire ordeal. “I really shouldn’t be the one to talk, but that’s not healthy, son.”

Tim scowls at him as he sits heavily on the couch. “Don’t talk down to me like that--like I’m a fucking kid.”

“I will until you quit acting like one.”

“Well, maybe we should just quit now, save you from having to deal with my immaturity.” He turns on the couch, scooting back to put his feet up on the armrest, as if to prove his point.

“You might as well cut that shit out too, Tim. You’re not going to get an easy out here, however much you think you might want one. I’m too invested and so are you, if not in our... relationship,” he nearly spits, “than in our fucking partnership.” Raylan pours himself a drink, deciding in advance Tim’s not allowed to have any more.

Tim lifts his head. “So, you don’t want to stop?”

“Quit asking like that,” Raylan tells him, pointing a finger. “I don’t know what I want to do. The point is to decide together. That’s what adults in a relationship do.”

If only Winona could hear him now, he thinks bitterly. All it took was someone with less emotional maturity than even he had. Raylan finds it astounding.

“Fuck you, Raylan,” Tim grumbles and Raylan grins. At least now they’re back to basics.

Raylan comes over to the couch, and sits on the side of it that Tim has laid his head, making him shift and lay it back down on his thigh. They never sit like this, but it feels natural. He can tell Tim would rather be close than far away from him tonight.

“If we didn’t have to stop or split,” Raylan asks, quietly, swirling the ice in his glass, “would you want to?”

“No,” Tim answers readily. “Of course not.”

“Then why do you think you should want to now?” He slides his free fingers into Tim’s still-gelled hair. He thinks, if he can get Tim relaxed, maybe he’ll be honest enough about it for both of them. “Take your time,” Raylan tells him.

Tim does take some time and he takes a breath, before he says, “I think I was waiting for it all to go wrong, so I could just walk away, and it wouldn’t be a big deal. Not to you. Not to

me. But nothing happened... and then I--things were so good and you--I thought...”

Raylan really wonders about Tim’s previous relationships, or lack thereof, that would make him think what they had was particularly great.

Raylan himself had thought, and was fine with the fact, that they had sort of been in a perpetual state of the beginning of a relationship. It was casual and fun and the sex was good and they worked together. It sounded complex, but he’d never thought of it that way, it hadn’t felt that way at all, until all of this came bubbling to the surface.

“What did you think?” he asks, when Tim doesn’t continue.

“I thought, when Dan was here this morning, I thought, finally. Finally I could just bow out. And it would be fine and we would be fine.”

“But you don’t think that now?”

“You were trying to help me,” Tim says, without really answering. “We were both in all this trouble, and you didn’t try to save your own skin, you spoke for me, you handled Dan for me, when all of this was my idea in the first place. I couldn’t... you’re always taking care of me.”

Raylan hasn’t ever thought of how he treats Tim like that at all. He feels as though he’s always doing the bare minimum, just checking in, asking pointed but subtle questions, making sure he’s all right, but not getting too close. He doesn’t understand how Tim can see it as this grand gesture, or something so important to him he’s speaking about it in such a hushed, reverent tone.

“I don’t know how to do that,” Tim says finally, so hushed now, Raylan can barely hear him.

“Do what?”

“Take care of people.”

Raylan’s not sure what to say to that, so he answers a question Tim asked him before. He says, still carding his fingers through Tim’s sticky hair, “I fell for a boy back home, a long time ago, ‘fore I ever looked twice at a woman.”

“Did you?” Tim’s voice is tired. Raylan thinks he should probably eat something, but doesn’t have a strong desire to disturb him yet.

“I ever tell you I worked a deep mine in Harlan, for about a year before I went to college?”

“No,” Tim yawns.

“I did. I met a boy there...well, I’d known him all my life, but I knew him there, better than I’d known anybody before. He had this smile, would glow in the dark, I tell you what. He was a crazy sonofabitch too. Loved to blow holes in the mountain. And we’d both run back and forth, picking up the coal, ‘fore the rest fell on our heads. We almost died once doing that. He saved my life.”

“Did he love you back?”

Raylan smiles softly. “In about as many ways as he could, I guess. We were real good friends, but he... he had obligations. His daddy had plans for him and Boyd--Boyd was his name--he was going to fulfill those obligations, but only on his own terms. He didn’t have any room for me, not after I told him I wouldn’t go in with him on his schemes.”

Tim tilts his head, trying to look up into Raylan’s face. “So, you never...” he trails off suggestively.

Raylan shrugs. “We were too scared, or I was at least, to ever really do anything about it. And by the time maybe we weren’t, what with our nearly dying hours previous, I didn’t want to anymore, because he was pissed I was leaving him behind and I was pissed he wouldn’t change for me. We were young, and stupid, and expected everything to be so easy.”

Raylan thinks about it for a minute and sighs, “I suppose I still do that from time to time. It’s easy to forget, the best things are the hardest to earn, hardest to hold onto.”

Tim sighs and leans more heavily on Raylan. “I don’t want to let it go so easy,” Tim says.

Raylan closes his eyes, letting his fingers twist certainly into Tim’s hair, made softer by his attentions. “I don’t want to either.”

“I’m sorry about all my shit,” Tim says after a while of just them sitting, absorbing, Raylan supposes. He sits up to look Raylan in the face, his expression full of regret and some embarrassment.

Raylan frowns at him. He touches his face. “I guess I’m just sort of confused, Tim. The way all this started, I didn’t really think you were gonna be the one, had any trouble with... us, I guess.”

Raylan had thought he’d get bored first, or do something stupid and hurtful, or Tim would realize he wanted more than Raylan could give. He’s still wondering if that’s going to happen, but he’s not about to quit just because Dan tells him to.

Tim grimaces, unaware of Raylan’s lingering doubts. “It’s hard,” he says. “Pushing it down for so long. I was ready--I wanted so badly to kiss you, when I saw you lose it in that bar--no, I mean,” he looks down, then quickly back up, “after, I mean, I wanted you and I wanted to make you feel better. I was ready to do it, for you and for myself. But--”

Raylan really wants to hear what he has to say, but he can’t let the opportunity pass, to tell him, “Tim, that’s taking care of somebody. This whole thing started when you felt like you could take care of me. You did. I needed that.”

Tim’s eyes widen like he hadn’t considered it that way at all before. “Oh,” he whispers then blinks. “Man, I’m an idiot about this stuff.”

Raylan smiles. “You should talk to my ex-wife.” At Tim’s look of horror, he laughs, and says, “Maybe not. But, you know, kid, I’m not the resident expert on relationships either. I guess,

we'll just have to be patient with each other."

Tim tilts his head, twisting a little to rest his chin on Raylan's chest. "Do you think we'll get the same kind of patience from Dan?"

Raylan frowns. "I dunno, Tim. You can ask him not to out you, but there's gonna be questions about why he's splitting us up."

"I don't care," Tim replies emphatically. "If it seems like I do, it's because I'm being stupid about it. Falling into old habits I don't need anymore. Let him tell everybody. Let them think we fell in love like Mulder and Scully."

"Is that was we did?" Raylan smirks.

Tim gives him a goofy smile. "Fuck the superior arrest record."

Raylan laughs and kisses him softly. "Well, I'm sure as shit glad it didn't take us seven goddamn seasons to figure it out."

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